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to the King

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A SERMON

Preached before the

KING

AT

WHITE-HALL,

Decemb. the 24th. 1676.

By THOMAS SPRAT, D.D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to his Majesty.

Published by his Majesties special Command.

LONDON:
Printed for *Henry Brome*, at the Gun
at the West end of St. *Pauls*. 1677.

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St. MARK, X. ver. 15.

Verily I ſay unto you, Whoſoever ſhall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he ſhall not enter therein.

THeſe are the words of our Bleſſed Saviour, on occaſion of his Diſciples forbidding little Children to be brought to him: which it may be ſuppoſed, they did in zeal for the reputation

of their Maſter; believing it to be far below the dignity of ſo great, and wiſe a Teacher, to ſpend time in inſtructing of Children; whilſt his chief adverſaries the Phariſees appear'd in their Synagogues, and moſt public Aſſemblies, and there, with much pompous oſtentation of profound Wiſdom, taught their men, thoſe that thought themſelves, in that Nation, their wiſeſt men.

But Chriſt himſelf underſtood better the intereſt, and power of his own Religion. He knew, that the deſign of his coming into the world, was, not to continue that Phariſaical, falſly-grave formality of life, and worſhip, which was then in uſe; but to introduce a rational, moral, ſpiritual Doctrine, and a plain, unaffected, ſaving way of teaching it. He knew, that his Doctrine ſo taught was able to convert the moſt ſpecious, worldly wiſdom; or to confound it, if it would not be converted.

And therefore he took a courſe quite contrary to the Phariſees practice, and to his own Diſciples expectations. He taught in the meekeſt manner, and refus'd not the meaneſt Scholars. *He reſiſted the proud,* S. James 4.6.

but

but he gave grace to the humble. The Scribes, and Phariſees he often ſharply contradicted, the multitude he always mildly inſtructed: By his different behaviour to the one, and the other, he gave evident proof, that all falſe pretences, and affectations of knowledge are more odious to God, and deſerve to be ſo to men, than any want, or defect of knowledge can be.

In proſecution of this moſt plain, and familiar way of teaching, whereas his Diſciples here would have rejected little children, he rebuked them, he took the children in his arms, he bleſſed them; for the innocence of their age, he gave it many teſtimonies of his extraordinary favour. Ver. 13, 14.

The firſt benefit he did to mankind in this world, was his becoming a child: The firſt ſign he ſhewed of his own Divine Wiſdom, was his diſputing with the Jewiſh Doctors, in the age of a child: The firſt example he gave of obedience, and that even to the Jewiſh Law, was his being circumciſed, when a child. And here alſo, when he would preſcribe a pattern of Evangelical purity, and humility, he declares, that little children, and thoſe men who

moſt reſemble their nature, are not only capable, but moſt capable of his heavenly Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God, and Heaven, in the New Teſtament, is either taken for that Eternal Reward prepared for thoſe that believe, and obey the Doctrine of Chriſt, or elſe for that Doctrine it ſelf revealed in the Goſpel: ſo nearly are the Joys of Heaven and the Laws of Chriſt united; ſo ſurely, ſhall the poſſeſſion of the one follow the practice of the other; that in the Word of God they are often both comprehended in the ſame phraſe of the Kingdom of God.

This expreſſion of receiving the Kingdom of God as a child, is beſt interpreted by our Liturgy, in the Office of Baptiſm; where it is ſaid, that *By theſe words our Bleſſed Saviour exhorts all men to follow the innocence of little children.*

Whoſoever therefore ſhall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, that is, Whoſoever ſhall not entertain and practiſe the word of God, with a true child-like ſimplicity and innocence, ſhall not enter therein; that is, ſhall not partake of the bleſſings of everlaſting life.

The

The whole ſenſe of my Text may be contained in two Propoſitions.

The firſt, That, for the right apprehending of the Doctrine of our Saviours Kingdom, the Goſpel, there is required an ingenuous plaineſs, an unfeigned ſimplicity of mind, and underſtanding.

The ſecond, That, for the ſure inheriting of the joys of that Kingdom, we are all commanded to practiſe an undiſſembled integrity of life and manners.

Of theſe, the firſt that I am to recommend to you, is, that ſimplicity of mind, which is neceſſary for the right receiving of Divine Truth.

All wiſe Maſters and Teachers, eſpecially if they profeſs any Art, that is deep, out of the way, and of great uſe, are wont to expect in their Followers, ſome præparatory skill in other lower Arts, before they will proceed to teach them thoſe that are higher. And here you ſee, our Bleſſed Saviour alſo requires his præparations, in thoſe whom he will inlighten with his heavenly Doctrine. But in a way how much different, how much more condeſcending than that of the Teachers of all worldly, and

Humane

Humane Arts! For towards the attaining of the moſt profound Wiſdom, as is the knowledg of God; in the moſt uſeful ſtudy, as is the ſalvation of our own ſouls: what præparations does he exact? Only the docility, the innocence, the ſimplicity of children.

But, before we proceed farther, this Chriſtian Simplicity muſt firſt be rightly ſtated, and well underſtood: For it has been often miſtaken on both extremes. Some make it to conſiſt in a blind Faith, as the Enthuſiaſts; ſome in a blind Obedience, as the Papiſts. The firſt conclude from hence for their wild illuminations, and groundleſs Inſpirations, and deny all manner of uſe of their natural underſtandings, and judgments in Divine things: The other build on it the neceſſity of an abſolute ſlavery of their underſtandings, and Conſciences to their Spiritual Governours: whereas the true Evangelical ſimplicity ſhould keep the ſober, middle way between both theſe: It is ſo to temper'd, as neither to extinguiſh the mans true natural light, nor invade the Chriſtians juſt ſpiritual liberty.

Firſt, I ſay, by this child-like ſimplicity of

of mind, there is not intended any defect of the natural, or acquir'd abilities of our underſtandings, or any neglect of employing our underſtandings in examining the moſt ſpiritual Doctrines of the Goſpel. As God did never require an entire perfection of Divine knowledge in any Chriſtian, ſo much leſs did he ever injoyn an imperfection of natural knowledge in any Saint. 'Tis true, the things of God muſt be ſpiritually diſcern'd: But how ſo? not that they muſt be diſcern'd by other faculties of the ſoul, quite different from thoſe, by which we diſcern natural Truth; but by the ſame faculties, only thoſe rais'd, and more ſpiritually exercis'd.

Does not the Goſpel tell us, that Gods is *a Reaſonable Service?* It is our moſt reaſonable duty, we being his Creatures: it is moſt conformable to right reaſon; it is the moſt noble object of it; it conſiſts in ſound, ſober, intelligible Doctrines, in plain, practicable, rational Precepts. Of all the Creatures, none that we know of, are capable of Gods grace, and mercy, and redemption by Jeſus Chriſt, but only Rational Creatures; not the brute Beaſts, that are Heb. 12. 1.

below our way of understanding, nor Angels, that are above it. And therefore certainly that which does, in some sense, put mankind only into a possibility of being saved, cannot be wholly excluded in the great work of salvation: certainly it is not the natural weakness of little children, but their native candor; not their want of knowledge, but their docility that is here proposed to our imitation.

Nor secondly, does this receiving the Kingdom of God as a child, suppose any implicit obedience, or blind resignation of our understandings to all the Commands and Impositions of any one present Church, or pretended Head of it, as the only infallible Judg of all matters of Faith.

Obedience is indeed a virtue most acceptable to God, most beneficial to men: Unity is one of his greatest blessings: Communion is the most beautiful ornament of the Christian Church. And, thanks be to God, there may be as much Union, and Communion amongst Christians, as is necessary for the being, and convenient for the well-being of Christianity, without any such tyranny in the Governours of the Church,

Church, or ſervitude in its Members: without inſlaving of private Conſcience, which is Antichriſtian; and only by a moderate governing, and reſtraining of private Conſcience, which is moſt Chriſtian, as well as moſt eſſential to the preſervation of human ſociety.

The Church has a ſacred and venerable Authority, as long as it teaches ſuch Doctrines, and requires ſuch Duties, as are agreable to our Saviours. Whilſt it does ſo, much reverence is due to it, much to the perſons, more to the Doctrines, to the perſons for their Doctrines ſake; to the Doctrines for our Saviours ſake. But if the name and title of the Holy Church of Chriſt ſhall be ſo abus'd, as to impoſe on our practice ſuperſtitious Precepts, as is the Worſhip of Saints, and ſome others; or on our underſtandings, incredible, impoſſible Doctrines, as is Tranſubſtantiation, and the like; in ſuch caſes, you are free by the Laws of God, and Man: Your ſpiritual obligations do not bind you to believe ſuch Doctrines, and your natural liberty, as well as your Chriſtian, ſets you free from obeying ſuch Precepts.

Our bleſſed Saviour here expects, that we ſhould receive his Laws, as children, but not as ſlaves. Thoſe Laws may be ſometimes ſevere, nay, they are imperial, and abſolute, as they come from God; for he is our Lord: but even in reſpect to him, they are paternal too, for he is alſo our Father. They are deliver'd to us with a Royal Power, and ſweetned by a fatherly tenderneſs; and they ſhould be received by us, with the duty of ſubjects, with the affection of children: As children we ſhould behave our ſelves to him, as children alſo to his Miniſters, becauſe they are to us in his ſtead: but ſtill as children, not as mean vaſſals. The true Church of God is the Vice-gerent of Gods ſpiritual, paternal Authority, which the Sectaries unjuſtly deny it; but it is not the Vice-gerent of Gods uncontroulable, omnipotent, temporal Power, which the Church of *Rome* as unjuſtly uſurps.

This being premiſed, we may now the better go on to examine, wherein the true, ſincere, Chriſtian ſimplicity conſiſts, as to that part of it, which concerns the receiving of heavenly Truth.

If

If we conſider the original example which we are here commanded to imitate, it ſeems that this bleſſed Temper is chiefly compos'd of three excellent virtues; of all which there is ſome weak reſemblance in little children.

As the minds of children are generally clear, ſpotleſs, white, untainted, unprejudiced; as they are uſually tender, gentle, pliable, capable of the beſt impreſſions; as children commonly receive their food, not with nicety, or with intent to quarrel at it, but willingly, and earneſtly, for their increaſe and growth: ſo, in conformity to that innocent pattern, all the true followers of Chriſt ſhould endeavour to obtain,

Firſt, a plaineſs, and purity of underſtanding; ſuch as is free from artifices, free from prejudices.

Secondly, a ſubmiſſive and guidable ſpirit, a diſpoſition eaſie to all; eſpecially tractable to thoſe, that have either a civil, or ſpiritual Authority over them.

Thirdly, an exact care ſo to learn the truths of Religion, that they may be employed for their true end, and beſt advantage, which is practice, and growth in

the duties of a pious, and devout life.

First, towards our right instruction in the Doctrines of the Gospel, we should all labour to bring our minds clear, unprejudiced, clean, uncorrupt. For the being void of errors, is the first great step to the greatest knowledge; and that understanding, in which though little is written, yet nothing is blotted; that which is not disfigured by ill impressions, is a subject most capable of the best. There nothing is required but plain teaching; whereas the mind that is either perverted by false knowledge, or made crooked by deceitful prejudices, must not only be taught, but first untaught that ill it had learn'd: and to unteach is a much more difficult work than to teach.

Such a pure, simple, undefil'd disposition of mind, by nature we cannot pretend to; bycause of the original corruption of our nature; but by the Grace of God in the Gospel we may attain it: and it is the chief design of the Gospel to direct us in the way to it.

That teaches us to cleanse, and repair by repentance, and amendment, our natural decays, and pollutions; to be constantly watch

watchful in keeping our ſouls free from carnal, moral, nay, ſpiritual prejudices againſt Religion; to endeavour ſincerely, that our minds be not often overthrown by violent paſſions, nor too much diſordered by worldly affections; not ſeduced by ſecular ends, that ſecretly undermine the ſoul; not corrupted by bodily luſts, that openly war againſt the ſoul; eſpecially that they be not infected by falſe Enthuſiaſtical conceptions, concerning God, and Religion; which are wont moſt dangerouſly to inſinuate themſelves into the ſoul, as ſeeming to come from Heaven, and coming under the ſhadow of Religion it ſelf.

The ſecond part of this child-like ſimplicity, is to be teachable, and that in a right method, to be deſirous of learning precepts, as well as truths; of truths to learn the plaineſt, and moſt uſeful, before the deepeſt and moſt ſubtle; of precepts to apply our ſelves to thoſe that concern our ſelves, more than others.

This teachable humility is not only conſiſtent with the greateſt ſpiritual knowledg, but inſeparable from it. 'Tis the property of all true knowledg, eſpecially ſpiritual, to enlarge

enlarge the ſoul by filling it, to enlarge it, without ſwelling it; to make it more capable, and more earneſt to know, the more it knows.

Even in natural things, whoever pretends to have learn'd ſo much, that he has no need, nor will to learn more, he has never learn'd any thing aright. And if this be ſo in natural things, in which the inſtruments, and helps of our knowledg are weak, and the objects of it finite; how much more is it ſo in Divine things? in which the inſtruments, the helps, the objects, the benefits of our knowledg are infinite. In Divine things to be always teachable, to be always learning, is not only the moſt certain way to Divine Wiſdom, but even a good degree of Divine Wiſdom it ſelf.

The third part of ſuch a true ſimplicity of underſtanding is a ſincere deſire, and unwearied endeavour to uſe, and improve our divine knowledg in a right manner, and to a right end. And what is the great, ſubſtantial, ſaving uſe, and end of all ſpiritual knowledg? Is it not to uſe it as children do their meat? to deſire the *ſincere milk of the word, as new born babes, that we may grow thereby?*

1 Pet. 2. 2.

by? That we may grow thereby. And they who receive their ſpiritual food in ſuch a manner, what they may want in a delicate appetite, they have in a wholeſom; if they come ſhort of others in the curioſity of their taſt, they as much exceed them in the ſtrength of their digeſtion: which in a ſpiritual life, as well as a natural, is a greater ſign of a healthful conſtitution: whilſt all other knowledg in Religion only ſerves to make a ſhew, and flaſhes away in diſcourſe, this endures, and is ſolidly beneficial for ſanctification here, for ſalvation hereafter.

Such is that ſimplicity of underſtanding, which is neceſſary for the right reception, increaſing, and improving of our knowledg in the truths of the Goſpel. I am next to conſider that ſimplicity of manners, which ſhould always accompany the ſincere entertainment, and practice of the precepts of the Goſpel.

This indeed has a very near connexion with the former. The head truly enlightned will preſently have a wonderful influence in purifying the heart; and the heart really affected with goodneſs, will much conduce to the directing of the head. The be-

ginning of this bleſſed work is moſt commonly in the head, the perfection in the heart; but neither of them can be perfected without the other.

And what now is meant by the true, unfeigned, Chriſtian ſimplicity of life, and manners, and converſation? we ought to be exceeding cautious on what kind of men we fix this character; for we live in an age, wherein, of all others, hypocriſie has put on the beſt counterfeited vizors, the moſt holy diſguiſes.

Firſt then, as I did before in the ſimplicity of underſtanding, ſo I muſt now do in this ſimplicity of heart: I muſt try to vindicate, and ſeparate it from the miſtakes, and extremes of it; and therefore I affirm, that it does not conſiſt in any ſullen ſeparation, or affected purity, or demure contempt, and omiſſion of the common cuſtoms, and uſages, and faſhions of this world. For moſt certainly, with ſuch common things a Chriſtian may comply, without danger, with true innocence and piety; and he may abſtain from them, out of the greateſt ſpiritual pride. Is not a moroſity and ſingularity in ſuch things often made a veil, and

cover

cover of licentiouſneſs in greater things? have we not known it frequently us'd as an opportunity of the greateſt moral diſhoneſty?

Muſt a Chriſtian by the obligations of his holy profeſſion, differ from, and abhor all the cuſtomary forms of civil life? how then could St. *Paul* become all things to all men? would he have conform'd univerſally to all ſorts of men, if all manner of civil, or ſpiritual conformity had utterly been unlawful.

Muſt I with unmannerly freedom, affront Authority, deſpiſe the public Formalities of Government, live in a different way, put on another face, and garb, than the reſt of my Country-men, and alledg the Chriſtian ſimplicity to juſtifie this my rudeneſs? what then will become of the Chriſtian liberty, which in other caſes theſe men ſo much magnifie? If this be Chriſtian ſimplicity, was not the Moſaical ſeverity a much lighter yoke? Did not our Bleſſed Saviour himſelf aboliſh all ſuch Judaical reſervedneſs and ſeparation, at the very firſt founding of the Catholic Church? which, it is probable, had never been Catholic ſo

ſoon, if he had diſtinguiſhed his Diſciples from all the reſt of mankind, as the Jews were, in every little circumſtance, or cuſtom of humane life. For whilſt the true Religion it ſelf was ſtraitned by the Jewiſh, ſevere ſpirit; the Church of God was narrow in compaſs, confin'd almoſt to one Country, deſpis'd by all the world beſides. It was the honeſt freedom, and univerſal charity of the Chriſtian ſpirit, that firſt rent the veil, and enlarg'd its bounds, and ſpread its authority to the utmoſt ends of the earth: ſo that next to the Almighty Power of God, one of the chief occaſions of the prodigious ſwiftneſs of the Churches firſt progreſs, was, that the Primitive Chriſtians aſſerted the juſt liberties of humane nature, and ſet men free from the Jewiſh unreaſonable ſowerneſs, and harſh impoſitions.

'Tis true, we are commanded not *to* Rom. 12. 2. *be conform'd to this world*: But in the very next words, we have the true interpretation of that command. For it follows, *Be ye transform'd by the renewing of your mind.* It is a new mind, and the transforming of the heart; not new looks, or habits, or geſtures, that Chriſtianity requires. To the indifferent

ferent things of this world we may be, to the decent things of it we ſhould be conformable; only to the wickedneſs, and corruptions of it we ſhould not. No Chriſtian is forbidden the honeſt skill, and practice, and prudence of this world; rather ſome are commanded it, all are allow'd it, only none muſt be perverted by it; all muſt uſe it, for higher, and more ſpiritual ends.

So far is the true Religion from obliging all its profeſſors, either to withdraw wholly out of the world, or in conſcience to avoid all the uſual obſervances, and manners, or even the innocent delights of it, whilſt they are in the world; that perhaps none are more capable, as of bringing more benefit to mankind, ſo of doing more ſervice to God, or exerciſing more Evangelical Graces; than thoſe men, that are of the moſt practical lives, and engag'd in moſt ſecular buſineſs. Greater will be their victory over the world, if they ſhall converſe in it, without being defiled by it. If they ſhall labour to perform well all their natural, moral, political, and Religious Duties in it, moſt inſtructive will be the example of that Piety, moſt diffuſive that Charity, which is

ſet on a hill ſo eminent, and plac'd in ſo good a light.

Were a Chriſtian to be the Diſciple of *John the Baptiſt*, he might then indeed think himſelf bound to follow the ſolitary, rigid life of his Maſter in the Wilderneſs: But ſeeing he is to be a Chriſtian, he may be a Citizen of this world, as well, as of the New *Jeruſalem*: He ought certainly to imitate a greater example than of *John the Baptiſt*, that of our bleſſed Saviour himſelf; who, though he too had his time of retirement in the Wilderneſs, yet liv'd not there; but was frequently in the Temple, convers'd generally in the City, with all ſorts of people, went about every where doing good.

Luke 11.41. *Give alms*, ſays our Saviour, *of ſuch things as you have, and behold all things are clean to you.* Let but a Chriſtian perform the great, ſubſtantial duties of Chriſtianity; and all other ordinary things are clean, and lawful to him. *All things*; of which ſome things were denied to the Jews: *all things*, that are not unclean in their own nature: thoſe indeed can be lawful to none. The righteouſneſs and holineſs of the Goſpel conſiſts

not

not in doubting much; but in living well: not in a zeal againſt little things, but for great things, in being *zealous for good Works.* Tit. 2. 14. Undoubtedly there may be as much ſuperſtition, in ſome caſes, on a Religious account, to forbear doing what we lawfully may do; as it is to do what we ſhould not. Superſtition tranſgreſſes on both extremes, and may offend as much in a too ſcrupulous forbearing, as in over-doing.

The true Chriſtian Purity, and ſimplicity of life, that is here recommended, is therefore ſuch, as is not bound to avoid all manner of compliance with the external faſhions, and comely ceremonies of human life, and converſation. 'Tis enough, if it uſes ceremonies, as ceremonies; if it prefers the ſubſtance far before them, if it chiefly regards the inward reality. 'Tis ſuch, as is not at all oppos'd to decency, or civility, or good manners, or good breeding; but to craft, unjuſt artifice, guile, and diſſimulation. 'Tis ſuch, as, according to our Saviours own precept, muſt have *the harmleſneſs of the Dove*, and yet may have the *wiſdom of the Serpent.* Mat. 10. 16. That wiſdom, which ſingle in the Serpent is hurtful, and poiſonous, when

when it is temper'd with the innocence of the Dove, is moſt commendable, moſt uſeful.

In a word, 'tis ſuch a ſimplicity, as St. *Paul* the Chriſtian put on, when he ceas'd to be *Saul* the Phariſee: ſuch as St. *Paul* himſelf deſcribes, when he thus exhorts the Corinthians: *Brethren*, ſays he, *Be not children in underſtanding; in malice be ye children, in underſtanding be ye men.* You ſee to all true Chriſtians a manly underſtanding, is as much commanded, as a child-like purity: ſo that in the moſt Euangelical ſimplicity, the prudence, and diſcretion of a wiſe man may be, ſhould be joyn'd with the native innocence, and inoffenſive meekneſs of a little child.

1 Cor. 14. 20.

You now behold the ſum of thoſe duties, to which, by the words of our Saviour in my Text, we are all oblig'd. They repreſent to us the neceſſity of a ſimplicity of mind, in receiving the Laws of Chriſt, and of an honeſt plaineſs of heart, in living accordingly: which indeed are the two principal things, that, in all true Religion, are to be ſtudied, and practis'd by all good men.

Some

Some proportion, and degree of both theſe virtues, I ſay, is neceſſary to all Chriſtians. I do not ſay, the higheſt and moſt complete degree of them to any: that is inconſiſtent with the frailties of our mortal condition, which God himſelf is pleaſed to conſider, in the gentleneſs of his Precepts. His Laws are perfect, as he is perfect; holy, as he is holy: But, ſeeing we cannot be equally ſo, by reaſon of human infirmity, God is pleas'd to accept of integrity inſtead of perfection, to prefer ſimplicity before hypocriſie, confeſs'd ignorance, before preſumption. What we really, and humbly endeavour, out of his abundant Grace, he will help us to perform, or accept of our endeavours. As we muſt ſtrive to be children in innocence, ſo in his infinite goodneſs, he looks on us, to be but as children in weakneſs.

I am not ignorant, that this Doctrine of Chriſtian ſimplicity may ſound ſtrange in the ears of thoſe men, who conſult only the low, and mean intereſts of this life; and therefore fancy themſelves, in the proud imaginations of their own hearts, to be the only wiſe, and ſubtle men of this world.

With ſuch men, ſimplicity generally paſſes in the worſt ſenſe, for puſillanimity, weakneſs, folly, for a poor-ſpirited Chriſtian Grace, that amongſt the antient Philoſophers, they think, would ſcarce have eſcap'd the being reckon'd for a vice.

But let none be too haſty in condemning the true genuine ſimplicity: for I muſt tell them, it has always had an extraordinary preeminence, and dignity, not only in Religion, though chiefly there; not only in the ſight of God, though that certainly were ſufficient: but in all other things, in the judgment of all truly-wiſe men, in all the works of nature, and art, in all the beſt practice of civil life.

If we obſerve the order of the whole Creation, and the ranks of all things viſible, and inviſible, are not the higheſt, and moſt perfect Beings ſtill moſt pure, moſt ſimple, and moſt of one nature? Thus it is from the nobleſt bodies to the ſouls of men, from the ſouls of men to Angels, from Angels to God himſelf: the higher any of theſe riſe in their excellence, they are ſtill the more ſimple in their eſſence.

If

If we examine all the productions of mens hands, or minds; is not the greateſt perfection of all Art, a moſt exact imitation of true nature? There is ſome kind of eaſie, ſolid plaineſs, that far excels all the comelineſs of artificial ornaments. There is ſome kind of ſimplicity that is attended with inexpreſſible majeſty. That, ſays St. *Chryſoſtom* on thoſe words of St. *Matthew*, like to theſe in my Text, that is the great deſign of all Philoſophy, that is the very life of Angels, to have the higheſt underſtanding accompanied with unfeigned ſimplicity.

St. *Chryſoſt.* on St. Matth. 19. 14. ἔτι γὰρ φιλοσοφίας ὅρος, μετὰ συνέσεως ἁπλᾶσαι εἶναι· τοῦτο βίου ἀγγελικός.

If we reflect on the moſt polite cuſtoms and manners of human life, nothing is truly graceful, that is over-mix'd, or unnaturally forc'd; no word we ſpeak, no phraſe we uſe, no geſture, no tone of voice, that is over-artificial, but it preſently offends: nothing in beauty, in habit, in action, in motion, can pleaſe, that is affectedly labor'd, and over-adorn'd: nothing has ſo much reverence in human converſation, as true ingenuity, manly plaineſs, gentle eaſineſs, undiſſembled ſincerity: nothing ſooner, or more, or longer, affects men with delight, and love,

and admiration: nothing is more honorable, nothing more amiable, nothing indeed more eaſie, and ſafe. It is very probable, that more deep, dark, reſerv'd, crafty men, have at laſt fail'd of their deſigns, even in this world, than the plain, upright, houeſt men. The crafty man has many parts to play, many minds to put on, many faces to ſhift; ſo that it is almoſt impoſſible for him ſo to act all, as not to be diſcover'd in ſome, and then he will be ſuſpected in all: whereas the honeſt man has but one part to perform, which is his own, and that far more eaſie for him to do; bycauſe he always acts according to plain nature.

Thus even in all worldly things, as nothing is perfect without decence; ſo nothing can be decent without ſimplicity. But above all things, this is true in Religion, eſpecially in the Chriſtian Religion. The Goſpel, in the great Duties, and Truths of it, is a plain and ſimple thing; it is ſimple in its end, which is one, and always the ſame, eternal life: ſimple in the means that conduce to that end, which are but two, and thoſe always the ſame, Faith and Obedience. And ſo ſimple ſhould be the

practice

practice of all, that would uſe thoſe means in a right manner, and expect thereby the benefit of that end.

Nothing ſhews a nearer reſemblance to the Divine Nature, than a mind that is pure, unmix'd, and undefil'd: nothing manifeſts a greater conformity to the Divine Laws, than a life of plain innocence: nothing more expreſſes that free, and generous diſdain, which all true Chriſtians have, or ſhould have of theſe earthly, tranſitory things: nothing declares a more magnanimous confidence in the Divine Providence: nothing a more ſubmiſſive reſignation to the Divine will: nothing a more ſtedfaſt, and aſſured hope of future happineſs: nothing can keep us ſafer from dangerous miſtakes in all matters of eternal concernment.

The plain, fair, even, candid mind, of which a right meaſure may ſooneſt be taken, is beſt prepar'd to take a right meaſure of ſpiritual things. That mild, and innocent diſpoſition, which leaſt of all deceives others, is leaſt of all capable of being dangerouſly deceived it ſelf, in the ways of everlaſting ſalvation. Have not more bold, venturous, artificial wits fallen into errors,

than they, who have been content with the ſteddy, conſtant, firm motion of meek, and humble Chriſtians? Whilſt thoſe preſume all on themſelves, they truſt to the moſt fallible guide: whilſt theſe wholly ſuſpect themſelves, and implore moſt the grace of God, they never fail of a certain aſſiſtance, and direction. And what has been generally the ſucceſs of both? the humble, teachable temper of the one has produc'd many real Saints: the proud, preſumptuous, ſubtle ſpirit of the other has prov'd a fruitful ſoil for the production of Heretics, or Atheiſts.

Give me leave therefore moſt humbly to adviſe, and beſeech you all, as you would be eſteem'd the true Diſciples of Chriſt, to labour for this bleſſed temper, which is moſt proper for Diſciples, this humble and ſincere practice of what you do know, this humble willingneſs to be taught what you do not know; and ſubmiſſion to thoſe that do.

I do not by this, in the leaſt, plead for the groſs blindneſs, and implicit Faith of the Laity, which is one of the chief Artifices of the Church of *Rome*. No, we that are Mini-

Miniſters of the Church of *England*, may be content; nay, we may really wiſh, that all our Laity had as much true, ſolid underſtanding in Religion, as our Clergy. We can get no advantage by your want of knowledge, no more than you can do by ours. We have no ſpiritual cheat with which to delude you; for the repreſenting of which we ſhould ſtand in need either of darkneſs, or of a falſe light. We have nothing in our public profeſſion, which the wiſeſt men, the moſt pious Chriſtians may not outwardly practice; nothing in our Faith, which they ought not inwardly to believe.

We know, and are well aſſur'd, that the only reaſon, why our Church is not more generally embrac'd, and admir'd, is, becauſe the purity of its Doctrine, the ſobriety of its Devotion, the moderation of its Diſcipline, the largeneſs of its Charity, are not more impartially, and calmly examin'd, more generally underſtood. Our Church in its Spiritual State, as you are Chriſtians, is moſt conformable to the Rules of Chriſt, to the Apoſtolical practice, to the Primitive Inſtitutions. In its Rational ſtate, as you

you are men, its Doctrines are very agreable to the reaſon of mankind; its Precepts moſt becoming the pureſt, and the ſtricteſt laws of Nature, and Virtue, and Morality. In its Political ſtate, as ye are *Engliſhmen*, its Intereſt is inſeparable from the Intereſt of our Nation, and Government.

We are therefore ſo far from being jealous of your moſt curious, and exact ſearch into the Practices, and Principles of our Church, that we deſire it; nay, we moſt earneſtly beſeech it. We are in no danger from mens moſt ſubtle inquiry into it; we may be from their utter careleſneſs, and indifference towards it.

We are not againſt any mans ſeeing Spiritual Truth; only we would not have the blind preſume to teach others to ſee: we would not have men think they ſee, when they do not; which is the moſt certain way for them never to ſee at all. We would have you know, as much as you can; only we would have you believe that both you, and we, may know much more than we do: We intreat you to ſtrive to know all, in a right way, by ſober degrees, for right purpoſes, and uſes, and ends.

Moſt

Moſt ſeaſonable is this advice; and I wiſh it could be moſt effectually recommended. For, to ſpeak plain truth, a meek, humble, teachable Spirit, and by conſequence, a devout, peaceable, and obedient Spirit are almoſt quite gone out of the world: whereas all things in Religion ſhould be plain, ſcarce any thing will now pleaſe, that is ſo: Whilſt ſo many ſtrive to be Teachers, and place moſt of their Religion in that, how many cenſurers have we of others? how many Reformers of the public? how few learners? how much fewer practiſers themſelves?

Alas! is it not apparent, that ever ſince ſo many of the Laity have ſo much invaded, ſo many have ſo much deſpiſed the Office of the Clergy; Pride has evidently prevailed over Humility, Faction over Unity, ill Nature over Charity?

Though I am not willing to make a Satyr on any Religious Party; nor do I think that the beſt way to reclaim them: our Conſciences ſhould convince their Conſciences, our Lives ſhould confute their Lives: elſe 'tis not enough only to employ our tongues, and our fancies againſt their

Conſciences: yet for Truths ſake, this I muſt ſay; that of all the Sects amongſt us, who contemn the Authority of the Church, who ſeparate themſelves from the great things of our Religion, on a diſlike of ſome ſmall things; and amongſt whom all think themſelves gifted Brethren alike: Whatever other virtues, or ſhadows of virtues, they may ſeem to have; whatever ſobriety of Life, or ſtrictneſs of Converſation, or freedom from ſome ſcandalous ſins they may pretend to: For which yet I cannot but ſay, that if they are really ſuch, as they pretend, I wiſh they were ours; yet may they not generally be obſerv'd to be exceedingly defective in the two principal, Fundamental Graces of Chriſtianity? which are Humility, and Charity. Humility of looks, or habit they may have; but have they as much of heart, or life? Charity of Good Works do they not too much deſpiſe, as a low, legal way to Heaven? Charity of Opinions, have they any at all?

It cannot be denied, but in this laſt Age, in moſt of our memories, our Nation has manifeſtly degenerated from the practice of former times, in many Moral Virtues, and

and Spiritual Graces, which ſhould teach us *to render to God, the things that are Gods, and to Cæſar the things that are Cæſars.* Where is that integrity of Manners, that truth of Converſation, that dutiful obſervance of Order, that modeſty of Private Life, that Charity towards men, that humble Devotion towards God, in which, we can only ſay we have heard, our Nation once excell'd?

'Twould be a melancholy employment to ſearch into the cauſes of this unhappy change: but whatever other occaſions may have contributed to the continuance and increaſe of it; certainly the chief cauſe of the beginning of it was Spiritual Pride, and Hypocriſie; the want, nay the contempt of an humble, and docible Spirit.

The different effects of this diſpoſition, and of that, which is contrary to it, have been abundantly tried in all Hiſtories, in all States, Civil, and Eccleſiaſtical; eſpecially Eccleſiaſtical. Thoſe Countries, and Societies of men have ever moſt flouriſh'd, where men have been kept longeſt under a reaſonable Diſcipline, thoſe, where the number of Teachers have been few in

compariſon to the number of Learners. There was never yet any wiſe Nation, or happy Church, at leaſt never any that continued long ſo: where all have thought themſelves equally fit, and have been promiſcuouſly admitted, to be Teachers, or Law-givers.

What can be the conſequence of ſuch a head-ſtrong, ſtiff-necked, over-weening, unmanageable Spirit? can any thing be more deſtructive to Church, and State, than ſuch a perverſe humor, as is unteachable, ungovernable it ſelf, and yet over-haſty to govern, and teach others? where Children get too ſoon out of the government of their Parents, and Maſters: where men think it a Duty of Religion, to ſtrive to get out of the Government of their Magiſtrate, and Prince: where Chriſtians ſhall think themſelves not at all bound to be under the Government of the Church, muſt not all domeſtic, and Politic, and ſpiritual Relations ſoon be diſſolv'd? muſt not all order be ſpeedily overthrown, where all the true ways to make, and keep men orderly, are confounded?

And

And what, in time would be the iſſue of ſuch a confuſion? what? but either groſs ignorance, or falſe knowledge? which is as bad or worſe: what? but a contempt of virtue, and prudence, under the diſgraceful titles of pedantry, and formality? what? but a looſeneſs of tongues, and lives? and at laſt mens taking pride in, and valuing themſelves on ſuch looſeneſs? what but a diſobedience to the Laws of man, in a pretence of the Kingdom of God; but, in truth, a neglect of all the Laws both of God, and man? In ſhort, what but mad Enthuſiaſm firſt, and then licentious Atheiſm? for very near is the diſtance, very eaſie the paſſage from one of theſe extremes to the other.

Wherefore for theſe moſt pernicious diſtempers, the great prevention, the beſt remedy is this in my Text, *that we all receive the Kingdom of God as little children*: that children be carefully inſtructed in Religion, as children, whilſt they are ſo: that our grown men, our wiſe men, eſpecially our witty men, ſhould not diſdain to be as children, in reſpect of ſpiritual inſtruction: that the ſame modeſty of opi-

nions, and duty to Governours, and ſubmiſſion to Inſtructors, which children have by nature, without any experience, they would ſtrive to have by choice, as the main end of, and beſt means to improve their greateſt wit, and experience.

Lam. 3. 27. *'Tis good for a man that be beareth the yoke in his youth.* 'Tis good for him that beareth it, not only for human ſociety: *'Tis good to bear the yoke*; the ſevereſt direction, the hardeſt reſtraint; much more to yield to the tenderneſs of counſel, the eaſineſs of inſtruction, the wholſom ſeverities of Diſcipline.

Firſt then, in the name of God, may the means of Education, the times of Inſtitution, the rules of Diſcipline, the Laws of Government, the diſtance and duties of Inferiors to Superiors, of all degrees, be moſt ſeriouſly regarded: that our men may be brought up to buſineſs, to profeſſions, fitted for the world, for Heaven, by the laborious methods of virtue, and knowledg, and obedience, by an exact Rule, by ſure degrees: no matter how ſlow, ſo they be but ſure; better too ſlow than too precipitate.

And

And laſtly, may our men of ripe years, our men of buſineſs, our great men be intreated to revive, and reſtore the antient ſimplicity, and integrity of manners: to practiſe an inward humility, and lowlineſs of mind; an outward innocence towards all, condeſcenſion to Inferiors, obſervance of Superiors, ſubmiſſion to Teachers, ſubjection to Rulers: and to practiſe all theſe excellent virtues, not only as ſo many moral, or political Duties, but, as indeed they are, as ſome of the moſt Chriſtian, moſt Spiritual, and moſt Evangelical Graces.

Thus for us all to become as Children, is the ſureſt way to preſerve where it is, to recover where it was loſt, private virtue, public honeſty, and a national piety.

And by the words of our Saviour in my Text, I am impowred to promiſe to this bleſſed Temper, an eternal Reward. For if *whoſoever ſhall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, ſhall not enter therein*: Hence we may well conclude, that whoſoever ſhall receive it as a child, ſhall enter therein. *For of ſuch*, ſays our Saviour, *is the Kingdom of God*. Of which I beſeech Almighty God to make us all partakers. *Amen.*

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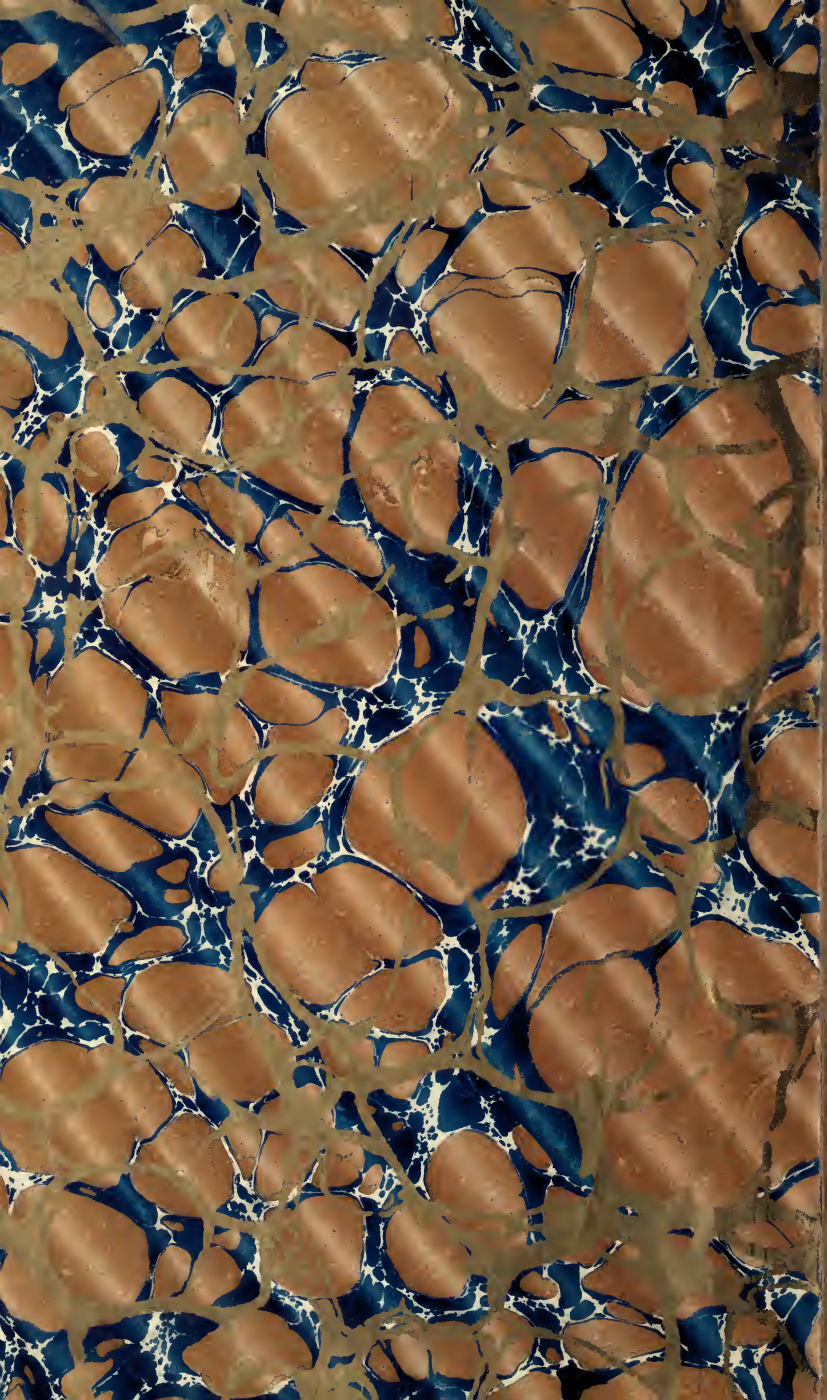
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